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SUBJECT: PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL VISIT TO THE UAE

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¶1. As the UAE hosts to an increasing number of USG travelers, the Mission offers the following perspective on how to plan for a successful visit, with a caution about overextended demands on the UAE leadership and a chronic lack of hotel capacity in Abu Dhabi, with periodic problems related to hotel space and cost in Dubai.

Effective visit protocol

¶2. For CY 2008 to date, the Mission has hosted almost 3000 official USG visitors. Of those, 16 were at the POTUS, FLOTUS, or Cabinet level. Amongst sub-cabinet senior officials, from Deputy Secretary to Deputy Assistant Secretary and military equivalents, we have hosted over 60 visitors, or about 6 per month. In addition, we have welcomed more than 24 CODELS and STAFFDELS.

¶3. Post appreciates the value of well focused senior level visits. From a protocol perspective, here are the keys to success:

--- TWO WEEKS ADVANCE NOTICE: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a "two week notice" policy for facilitating official meetings. Adherence to the MFA policy is critical to our success in seeking appropriate host nation interaction. For visits seeking Dubai senior appointments, the separate Dubai protocol structure creates yet another layer that requires significant early engagement to assure successful meetings. Short notice visitors often do not get the appointments they seek.

--- AIMING TOO HIGH MISSES THE TARGET: A large number of visitors seek meetings with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed, or in Dubai, Vice President, PM and Dubai Ruler Mohammed bin Rashid; these senior figures are increasingly unavailable. In this protocol conscious environment, aiming too high wears out our welcome and diminishes our access. Visitors are more likely to be successful in arranging meetings at the counterpart level.

--- TIMING IS KEY -- AVOID WEEKENDS AND HOLIDAYS: Emiratis remain protective of personal time, especially now that the pace of visitors from all over the world has increased. Family time, national holidays, vacations, and domestic (UAE-centered) duties often make senior Emiratis unavailable to meet foreign visitors. Official meetings are not scheduled on the weekend (Friday-Saturday) and from Thursday afternoon until Sunday mid-day senior Emiratis are often unavailable. In addition, there are specific holidays to avoid. On the immediate horizon, UAE National Day (December 2 but potentially extended for several days) and Eid al-Adha (the week of December 7 to 11) are blackout dates, for example, making it almost impossible to secure appointments for visits during the first half of December.

Abu Dhabi hotels at a premium -- always high season

¶4. Travelers must plan for the chronic shortage of hotel space in Abu Dhabi, which hosts an extraordinary number of international

business and cultural events. Prices rise with demand, which means astronomical (and shifting) rates often above the "actual lodging" limit of 300% of per diem. Recently, some visitors have been charged between \$750 and \$1000 for a double room, if they were available. When they were simply unavailable, we have sought booking in nearby cities, like Al-Ain, over an hour away. The Mission requires that all USG travelers to Abu Dhabi carry orders covering "actual lodging" costs. In view of these exceptionally high prices, USG officials should evaluate visits on a cost/benefit basis, and trim delegations where possible.

¶5. Beyond the high cost, hotels demand more advance notice, credit card guarantees on reservations, and strict cancellation charges (full cost). Fluctuating travel plans for USG visitors are an expensive luxury (cancelled visits can still result in large hotel charges). Travelers should plan ahead, book early (guaranteeing with a credit card), and be secure in their intentions well ahead of the trip. Given that we operate in a seller's market, we are often unable to prevent charges for cancelled rooms.

#### Transit Travel Coordination

¶6. Dubai International Airport (DXB), the region's largest and busiest (expected to crack 40 million passengers this year) is also the gateway to both Pakistan and Afghanistan for many official travelers. DXB is a world class airport, with ultra-modern infrastructure, and one that emphasizes customer service. Consulate General Dubai, with its limited staff and resources, is severely constrained in its ability to assist the many travelers transiting en route to these destinations. The Mission will do all it can, but most travelers should neither expect, nor require our assistance to transit via DXB.

¶7. Media Services and Public Affairs: Visitors desiring media

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services should, in their initial contact, inform post and provide contact information for the person responsible for the visitor's or the delegation's press and media relations, and provide any other information about media goals and requirements. PA organizes events in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai, but to be effective it must be involved from the start. All media engagements, public statements and public releases must be approved by the Ambassador.

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